

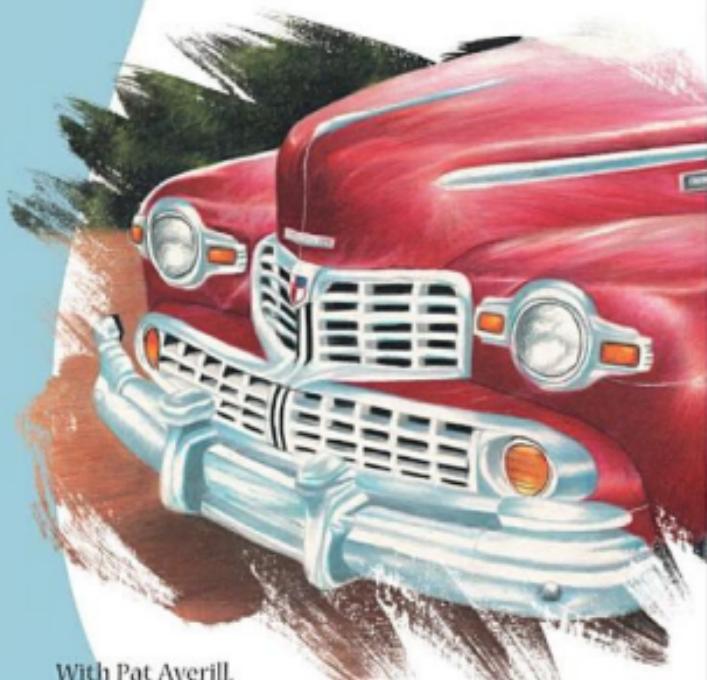
Walter Foster

Artist's Library Series

AL39

Colored Pencil Step by Step

Explore a range of styles and techniques for creating
your own works of art in colored pencil



With Pat Averill,
Sylvester Hickmon, and Debra K. Yaun

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Introduction

Colored pencil is a simple, versatile medium—it can be used to replicate the look of oils, watercolor, acrylic, and more. Although it has been used as a fine art medium for less than a century, its popularity has grown significantly over the last few decades. It's easy to understand why more and more artists are attracted to colored pencils—they are fairly inexpensive and convenient to transport. They are also nontoxic, easy to find in art and craft stores, and combine well with other media. Whether you choose to use colored pencils for sketches or to create fully rendered drawings, you will find that they are brightly hued and precise tools that are a joy to work with.

There are many different approaches and techniques to discover in colored pencil art—from layering and hatching to burnishing and blending. As you explore this art form, you'll discover many methods and materials that will help you realize the seemingly endless creative possibilities working with colored pencil offers. The important thing is to have fun while you develop your own artistic style—and enjoy creating your own works of art in colored pencil!



Little Red Rivals by Sylvester Hickmon

Tools and Materials

You don't need many supplies to get started in colored pencil, so you won't need to invest a lot of money. All you need in the beginning are a few basic colors, an eraser, a sharpener, and some paper. (For the projects in this book, refer to [pages 16–17](#) for the colors the artists use in their lessons). Just remember to buy the best supplies you can afford; with better-quality supplies, your artwork will stay as vibrant and colorful over time as it did when you first created it. Then, after you've become more familiar with the variety of effects you can create, you may want to purchase a few more specialized tools. As colored pencil is becoming a more popular medium, many new products are being developed to aid the colored pencil artist.

Pencils

As with all art supplies, the price of a pencil indicates its quality; better pencils have truer color. Many brands offer sets of pencils that provide a basic array of colors. Some art stores also sell colored pencils individually—this way you can pick and choose which hues you like best among several different brands. Once you've chosen your palette, make sure to store your pencils upright or safely in a container—and try not to drop them. The lead in a colored pencil is very brittle, and it's likely to break in the shaft if the pencil is dropped. This may not be immediately apparent, but will eventually render the pencil useless.



Choosing Pencils There are many types of colored pencils available—harder, thinner leads are ideal for rendering fine lines and detail, while softer, thicker leads are great for filling in large areas. Some manufacturers make both hard, thin lead and soft, thick lead versions of the same colors. Experiment to find which types you prefer.

Erasers

Colored pencil artists can't use ordinary erasers to correct their work; the friction between a rubber or vinyl eraser and the paper will actually melt the wax pigment and flatten the *tooth* (or grain) of the paper. Instead many artists use a small battery-powered eraser to remove the pigment without crushing the paper underneath. A kneaded eraser is also useful for removing small amounts of color; twist or pinch it into any shape you like and then press it lightly on the page to pick up the pigment. When it gets "dirty" and is not as effective, you can knead it (like dough) thoroughly to reveal a clean surface.

Papers

Textured papers are best for colored pencil work because the rough grain "catches" the color so it accepts more pigment than a smooth paper would. Art and craft stores carry a variety of textured watercolor papers and illustration boards that offer a good tooth for colored pencil art; look for a paper with a medium grain to start. For practice or for doing quick studies on site, you'll want to have a sketch pad or sketchbook. You might also want to consider experimenting with different colored papers and specialty papers; these surfaces can help you achieve some interesting effects. (See [page 13](#) for more information on special papers.)



Colored papers



Textured papers

Sharpeners

You can achieve various effects depending on how sharp or dull your pencil is, but generally you'll want to make sure your pencils are sharpened at all times; a sharp point will ultimately provide a smoother layer of color. Although a small hand-held sharpener will do, an electric or battery-operated sharpener is better suited for fine art purposes. You can also use a sandpaper pad to refine a pencil point.

Extras

You'll need a dust brush to gently remove the pencil residue from your paper, a spray-on fixative to preserve your finished drawing, and a paper blending stump to create soft blends. A pencil extender is handy when the pencil gets too short to hold onto comfortably, and you may want a triangle for making straight lines and some artists' tape for masking. It's also nice to have white gouache and a small brush on hand for adding tiny opaque highlights.



Sandpaper pad



Hand-held sharpener



Blending stump



Kneaded eraser



Triangle



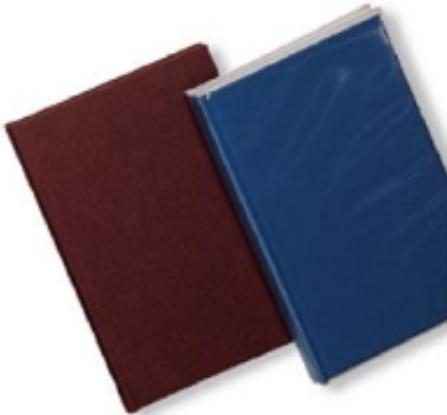
Pencil extender



Sketch pads



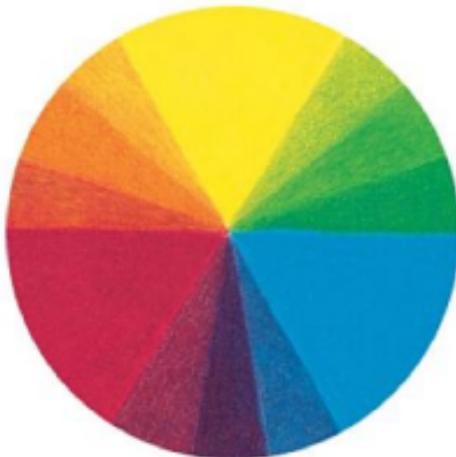
Sketchbooks



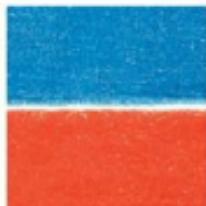
Pocket sketchbooks

Color Theory

Colored pencils are transparent by nature, so instead of “mixing” colors as you would for painting, you create blends by layering colors on top of one another. Knowing a little about basic color theory can help you tremendously in drawing with colored pencils. The *primary* colors (red, yellow, and blue) are the three basic colors that can’t be created by mixing other colors; all other colors are derived from these three. *Secondary* colors (orange, green, purple) are each a combination of two primaries, and *tertiary* colors (red-orange, red-purple, yellow-orange, yellow-green, blue-green, blue-purple) are a combination of a primary color and a secondary color. *Hue* refers to the color itself, such as blue or purple, and *intensity* means the strength or *chroma* of a color (usually gauged by pressure applied or pencil quality in colored pencil).



Color Wheel A color wheel can be a useful reference tool for understanding color relationships. Knowing where each color lies on the color wheel makes it easy to understand how colors relate to and react with one another.



Using Complements When placed next to each other, complementary colors create lively, exciting contrasts. Using a complementary color in the background will cause your subject to seem to “pop” off the canvas. For example, you could place bright orange poppies against a blue sky or draw red holly berries amid green leaves.

Value

Value is the term used to describe the relative lightness or darkness of a color (or of black). It is the manipulation of values that creates the illusion of form in a drawing, as shown in the sphere on page 7. For more on value and colored pencil, see “Pressure” on [page 8](#) and “Understanding Value” on [page 48](#).

Complementary Colors

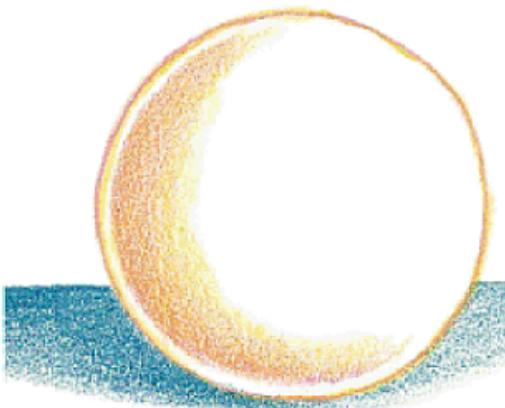
Complementary colors are any two colors directly across from each other on the color wheel (such as red and green, orange and blue, or yellow and purple). You can actually see combinations of complementary colors in nature—for instance, if you look at white clouds in a blue sky, you’ll notice a hint of orange in the clouds.



High Key Versus Low Key A high key drawing is filled with light values and evokes an airy, carefree feeling (left), while a low key drawing uses mostly dark values and creates a more mysterious or somber mood (right).



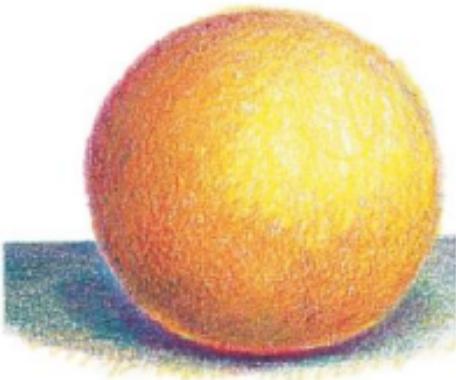
Grays Most colored pencil brands offer a variety of grays. They distinguish them by naming them either “warm” (top row) or “cool” (bottom row) and then adding a percentage to indicate the concentration of color, such as “cool gray 20%” (the lower the percentage, the lighter the value).



Creating Form Draw the basic shape. Then, starting on the shadowed side, begin building up color, leaving the paper white in the area where the light hits directly.



Varying Values Continue adding color, gradually deepening the values to create the spherical form of the ball. Squint your eyes to blur the details, so you can focus on the value changes.



Building Depth Add the darkest values last. As the sphere curves away from the light, the values become darker, so place the darkest values on the side directly opposite the light.



Color Values In this diagram each color was applied using graduated pressure—light, then heavy, then light. Then black was applied at the top and white was applied at the bottom to tint and tone the colors, respectively.

Color Psychology

Colors are often referred to in terms of “temperature,” but that doesn’t mean actual heat. An easy way to understand color temperature is to think of the color wheel as divided into two halves: The colors on the red side are warm, while the colors on the blue side are cool. Thus colors with red or yellow in them appear warmer, and colors with more green or blue in them appear cooler. For instance, if a normally cool color (like green) has more yellow added to it, it will appear warmer; and if a warm color (like red) has a little more blue, it will seem cooler. Another important point to remember about color temperature is that warm colors appear to come forward, and cool colors appear to recede; this knowledge is valuable when creating the illusion of depth in a scene.

Tints, Shades, and Tones

Pure colors can be *tinted* with white to make them lighter, *shaded* with black to make them darker, or *toned* with gray to make them more muted. However adding a layer of black or white over a pure color might dull the color a bit. To revive some of the original intensity, go back over the tint or shade with the pure color. Also, to tint a color without muting it, try applying the white first and then adding the color over it.



Warm Versus Cool Here the same scene is drawn with two different palettes: one warm (left) and one cool (right). Notice that the mood is strikingly different in each scene. This is because color arouses certain feelings; for example, warm colors generally convey energy and excitement, whereas cooler colors usually indicate peace and calm.



Color Mood The examples above further illustrate how color can be used to create mood (left to right): Complements can create a sense of tension; cool hues can evoke a sense of mystery; light, cool colors can provide a feeling of tranquility; and warm colors can create a sense of danger.

Colored Pencil Techniques

Colored pencil is amazingly satisfying to work with, partly because it's so easily manipulated and controlled. The way you sharpen your pencil, the way you hold it, and the amount of pressure you apply all affect the strokes you create. With colored pencils, you can create everything from soft blends to brilliant highlights to realistic textures. Once you get the basics down, you'll be able to decide which techniques will capture your subject's unique qualities. There are as many techniques in the art of colored pencil as there are effects—and the more you practice and experiment, the more potential you will see in the images that inspire you.

Strokes

Each line you make in a colored pencil drawing is important—and the direction, width, and texture of the line you draw will all contribute to the effects you create. Practice making different strokes, as shown in these examples. Apply light, medium, and heavy pressure; use the side and then the point of your pencil; and experiment with long, sweeping strokes as well as short, precise ones.



Light
pressure

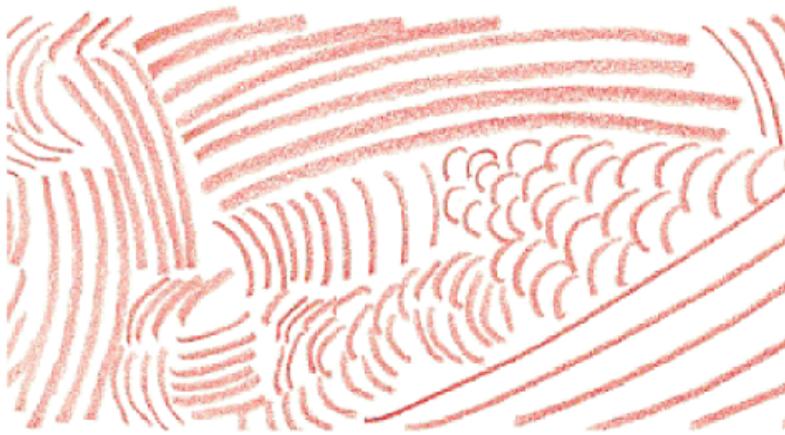
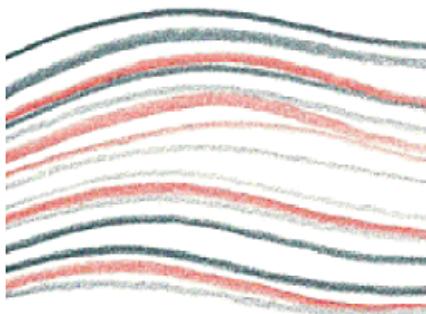
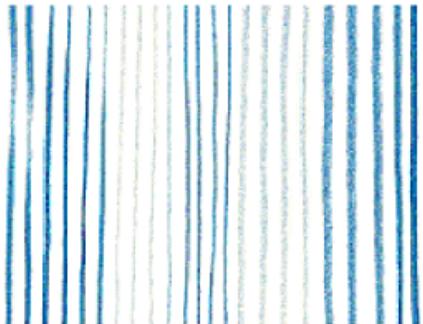


Medium
pressure

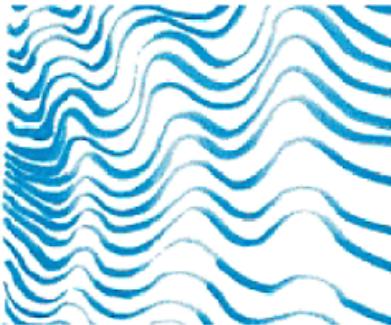


Heavy
pressure

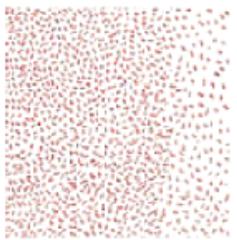
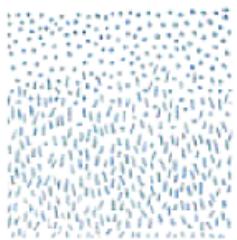
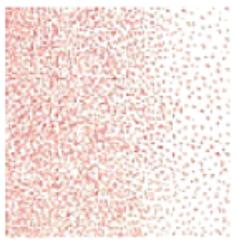
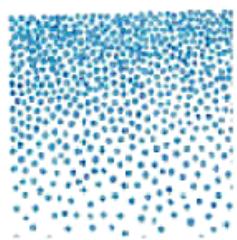
Pressure Varying the amount of pressure you use on your pencil is an easy way to transition between values. Since colored pencils are translucent, the color of the paper underneath will show through. With light pressure, the color is almost transparent. Medium pressure creates a good foundation for layering, and heavy pressure flattens the paper texture, and the color appears almost solid.



Strokes and Movement While a group of straight lines can suggest direction, a group of slightly curved lines conveys a sense of motion more clearly. Try combining a variety of strokes to create a more turbulent, busy design. Exercises like these can give you an idea of how the lines and strokes you draw can be expressive as well as descriptive.



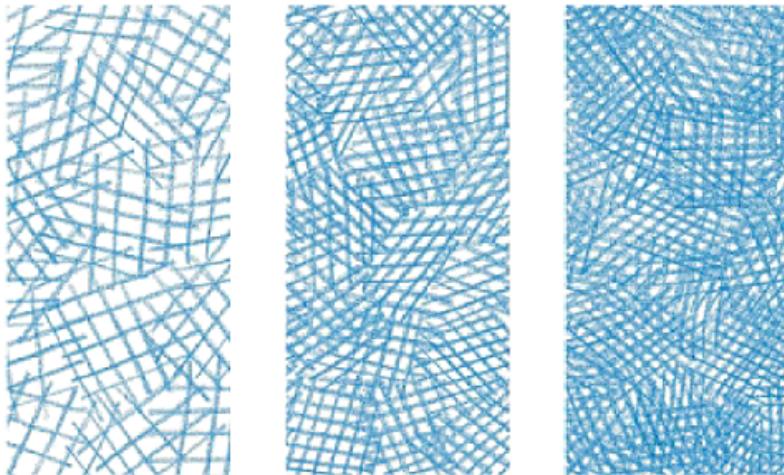
Varied Line Try varying the width and weight of the lines you create to make them more textured and interesting. These calligraphic lines can help create a feeling of dimension in your drawing.



Strokes and Texture You can imitate a number of different textures by creating patterns of dots and dashes on the paper. To create dense, even dots, try twisting the point of your pencil on the paper.

Hatching

The term *hatching* refers to creating a series of roughly parallel lines. The density of color you create with hatch strokes depends on the weight of the lines you draw and how much space you leave between them. *Cross-hatching* is laying one set of hatched lines over another but in the opposite direction, producing a meshlike pattern. Hatch and cross-hatch strokes can both be used to fill in an almost solid area of color, or they can be used to create texture, as shown at right.



Cross-Hatched Spacing Filling in space with cross-hatch strokes in random directions creates the dense, haphazard texture shown above. For a smoother, more even texture, make cross-hatch strokes in two directions only (left leaning and right leaning).

Handling the Pencil

Although there is no single “correct” method for holding the pencil, the way you do so will have a direct impact on the strokes you create. Some grips will allow you to press more firmly on the pencil, resulting in dark, dense strokes. Others hinder the amount of pressure you can apply, effectively rendering your strokes lighter. Still others give you greater control over the pencil, allowing you to create fine details. Try each of the grips below, and choose those that are the most comfortable and create the effects you desire.



Overhand Grip Guide the pencil by laying your index finger along the shaft. This is the best grip for strong applications of color made with heavy pressure.



Conventional Grip For the most control, grasp the pencil about 1-1/2" from the tip. Hold it the same way you write, with the pencil resting firmly against your middle finger. This grip is perfect for smooth applications of color, as well as for making hatch strokes and small, circular strokes. Try to relax and let the pencil glide across the page.

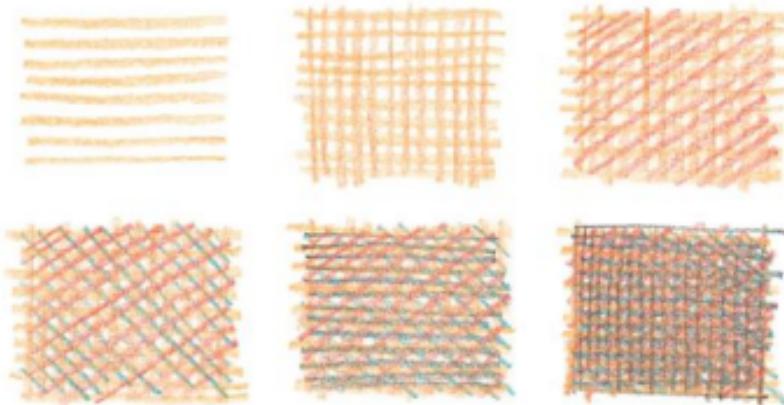


Illustrations © Quarto Publishing plc

Underhand Grip When you cradle the pencil in your hand (as in either example shown above), you control it by applying pressure only with the thumb and index finger. This grip can produce a lighter line, but keep in mind that when you hold the pencil this way, your whole hand should move (not just your wrist and fingers).

Layering and Blending

Because colored pencils are translucent, artists use a transparent layering process to either build up color or create new hues. This layering process is wonderful because it creates a much richer hue than you could ever achieve if you were using just one pure color. To deepen a color, layer more of the same over it; to dull it, use its complement. If you want to blend your strokes together, you can use a colorless blender, as shown at the bottom of the page.



Layering with Hatch Strokes In the examples at right, yellow, orange, red, and blue were layered on top of one another with cross-hatch strokes to demonstrate one way of creating a new color. To avoid getting a hue that's too dark, begin with the lightest color and work up to the darkest. This way you can tell if the mix is getting too muddy or deep before it's too late.



Building Up Color Here is a simple still life rendered with layers of hatch strokes. The forms of the fruit were built up by layering different values of the same color and then dulled a bit with a touch of their complements. Notice that the shadows under the fruit are blends of many different colors; they are never just gray or black.



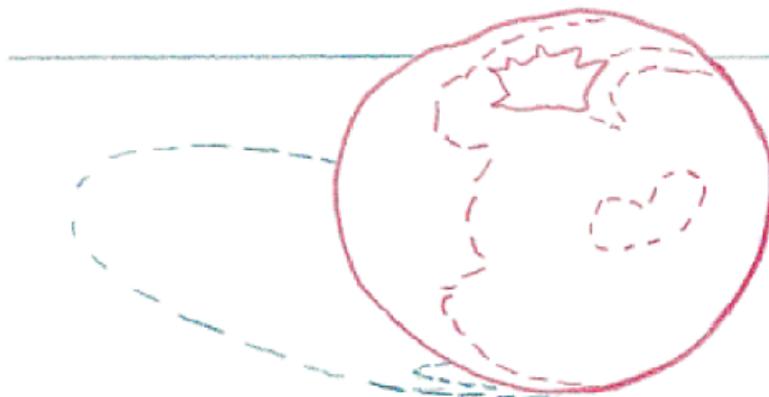
Colorless Blender This special marker dissolves the pigment, creating a smooth, solid color. Apply it over the pigment, as shown here, or on the blank paper before you add color.



Using a Colorless Blender The example at left shows a quick study created with colored pencils. In the second example at right, a colorless blender was used to blend the pigments. Notice how much smoother the strokes appear after blending. The surface of the paper also becomes a little slick after using the blender, so any colors you add over the blended layer will glide easily on the page.

Burnishing

Burnishing (or opaque layering) is a blending technique that requires heavy pressure to meld two or more colors, which also flattens the tooth of the paper. Usually a heavy layer of white (or another light color) is applied over darker colors to create a smooth, shiny blend, as shown in the example below. Try not to press too hard on the underlayers of the area you intend to burnish; if you flatten the paper too soon, the resulting blend won't be as effective.



Step One Begin with a line drawing in *local color* (the actual color of the object) so the outline won't be visible when you're done. Press lightly so the outlines aren't impressed into the paper surface, creating dents. Here the solid lines indicate where hard edges will be, and the dashes or broken lines denote soft edges and shadows.



Step Two As you fill in the outlines with layers of color, keep the pencils sharp. Apply light to medium pressure as you slowly build color from light to dark. Use short, controlled strokes for a smooth tone, gradually lessening the pressure at the edges to make them soft. Here the darkest areas are created with green, the complement of red.



Step Three Next layer the different values of red and green, using heavier pressure. Be sure to fill in any highlights with white; this will act as a sort of barrier against saturation from the other colors.



Step Four Finish by using a semi-sharp white pencil with circular strokes to burnish first the highlights and then the rest of the object. You may need to burnish over the same areas more than once to get an even blend.



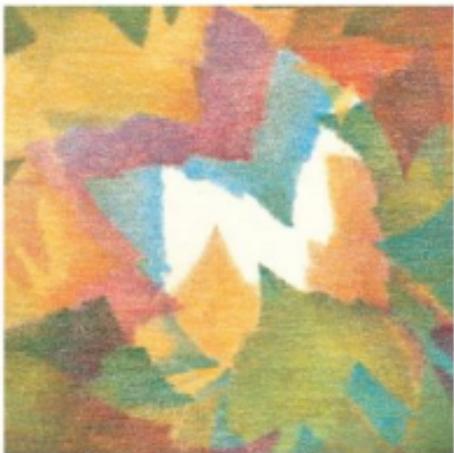
Effects of Burnishing Here various colors and techniques were used to burnish over the same red hue. At far left is the original, untouched color. To the right of that is shown the effect of burnishing with white, with blue, and with yellow, in that order. At far right, a blending stump was used to burnish the color. There are also colorless (without pigment) blending pencils available that many artists prefer—they are nontoxic and easy to use.

Special Effects and Techniques

As you're working in colored pencil, you may sometimes need to go beyond the basics and use some specialized techniques and materials, like the ones shown here. For example, you may choose to use black paper to provide a dramatic backdrop, lift off color with tape to reveal highlights, or make impressed lines to create texture. There are literally hundreds of possible techniques, so feel free to invent your own!



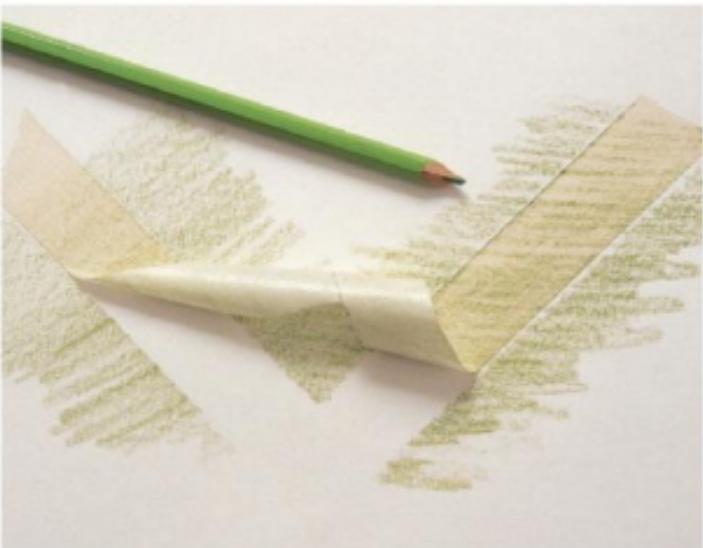
Impressed Line To resist color with an impressed line, draw a design on tracing paper, place it over your drawing paper, and trace over it firmly to leave an impression on the paper underneath. (You can also press lines directly into the paper with your fingernail or a stylus.) Then shade over the impressed lines, using the side of the pencil and light pressure to avoid filling in the lines completely.



Using Stencils For a stylized pattern, cut out a stencil and draw the shape repeatedly on your paper. For the pattern shown above, randomly fill in the shapes with a variety of colors.



Using Transparent Tape to Erase For soft highlights, such as the light line shown on the pencil at right, place transparent tape over the area. Then use a stylus to draw over the tape where you want to remove color. Carefully lift off the tape; then repair the spots where too much color was lifted. Try testing this on your paper before drawing, since some papers could be damaged by this technique. And if the tape removes too much color, stick the tape to your clothing first (to remove some of the tack) and then try again.



Masking with Tape You can use artists' tape or masking tape to create clean lines and simple borders, as shown above. Just place the tape where you want it, apply color over it, and then remove it to reveal clean lines underneath.



Using Ink Using a finetipped, permanent marker is an interesting way to create dark values, as in this leaf. When you layer translucent pencil over the ink, the ink will show through, creating a darker value than you'd get with pencil alone. Just be sure to use a smudge-proof marker so it won't smear on your drawing paper.



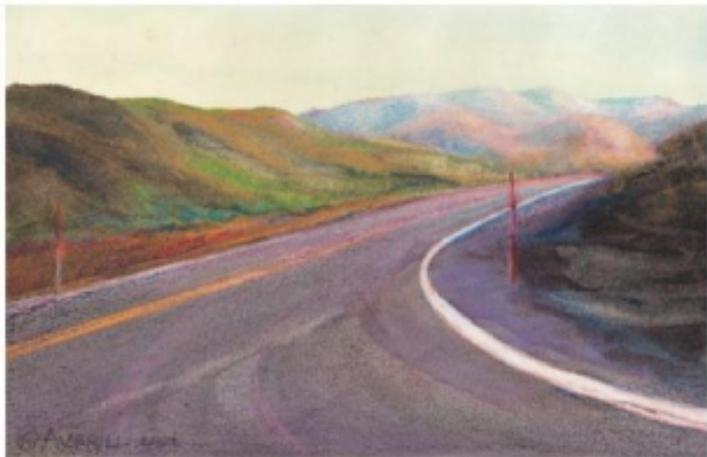
Frottage Rubbing over a textured surface, like the leaf at right, with the side of a pencil is a technique called “frottage.” This creates an impression of the object (and its texture) on your paper.

Watersoluble Pencils

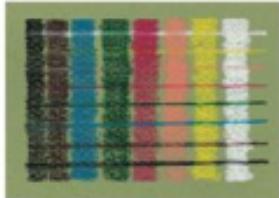
Watersoluble, or watercolor, pencils offer the same amount of control and detail as regular colored pencils, but they have the added versatility of being similar to painting tools as well. When you blend them with a brush and water, the artwork you create will have a softer and more painterly effect.

Special Papers

You can also use colored grounds, multimedia panels, illustration boards, and specialty papers (such as velour, sandpaper, or mylar) for your drawings. Each will give you a different result—some offer more texture or provide an undercolor, and others are better suited for mixed-media projects. When choosing paper, make sure you select one of high quality, and test out the pencils and techniques you plan to use ahead of time.



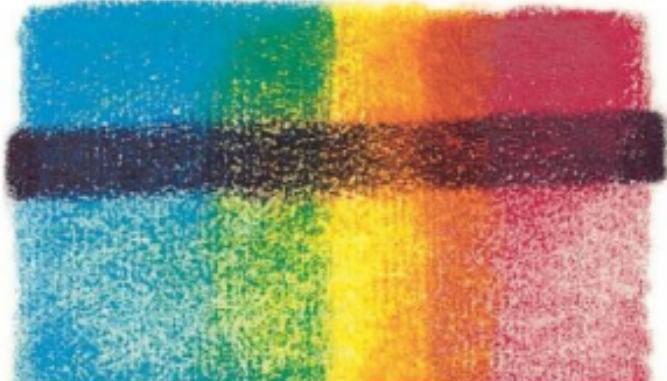
Watersoluble Pencil You can blend watersoluble pencils with a wet brush (see top example) to create soft blends like the ones shown (in the bottom example) in the sky, in the hills, and on the road. Here the rest of the scene was created with regular wax-based colored pencils.



Colored Grounds If you choose a colored support that shares a dominant hue in your drawing, you can create harmony among the colors in your drawing and save a significant amount of time—the paper provides a medium value to build color on (see example at right). Make a test sheet first on the back of your paper (or on a scrap piece of paper, as shown above) to see how the colors in your palette will be affected by the colored ground you choose.



Black Paper The contrast of light colors on black paper creates a sense of drama. Bright, colorful subjects appear even bolder over a dark ground. For the most brilliant hues, apply a layer of white before applying color over it.



Sanded Paper "Sanded paper" has a gritty quality to it that lends an interesting texture to colored pencil art. The rough surface will sand off the point of your pencil, so make sure to keep a dust brush handy to sweep away the residue.

About the Artists

Debra Kauffman Yaun

A graduate of the Ringling School of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida, Debra Yaun began her art career as a fashion illustrator and graphic designer. Later she discovered a book on colored pencil in a library and fell in love with the medium. Now she stays busy with portrait commissions and nature drawings. As time allows, she teaches an occasional art class. Her artwork has been published in several art magazines and books, and Debra is a juried member of the Portrait Society of Atlanta, where she serves on the board of directors. She is also a member of the Colored Pencil Society of America.



Pat Averill

Although she considers herself primarily self-taught, Pat Averill has attended an array of workshops and seminars on oil, watercolor, and colored pencil. She considers the way she figuratively "inhales" the colors, values, and shapes she observes around her to be an integral part of her artistic process. To her, the creation of art is based on a combination of life experiences and the artist's reaction to the subject matter. Pat is a charter member of the Colored Pencil Society of America, and she has won numerous awards in juried international exhibitions for her work in colored pencil.



Sylvester Hickmon, Jr.

Native South Carolinian Sylvester Hickmon, Jr., became interested in art at an early age. He received his formal art training at South Carolina State University, Orangeburg, where he earned a Bachelor of Science in Art Education. For the past 13 years, he has taught art at the high school, middle school, and elementary school levels. He also conducts workshops on drawing with colored pencil. Sylvester has exhibited throughout the United States, and his works can be found in many private collections. He has also received numerous regional awards and national recognition for his colored pencil art. Sylvester is a signature member of the Colored Pencil Society of America, a member of the Sumter Artists' Guild, and serves on the Board of Directors of the Sumter Gallery of Art.



Color Palettes

Every artist has a group of favorite colors and brands they prefer working with; below are the colors each artist uses for the projects in this book. Keep in mind that the names of the colors may vary among brands; sometimes two pencils that have the same name are two different hues.

Debra Yaun



Magenta



Peach



Canary yellow



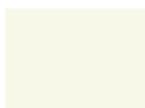
Forest green



Dark umber



Black



White



Cobalt blue

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